<p align="center">**LIS 313**: **Reference and Information Services**</p>

Week 1: Evolution, theory and objectives of reference and information services.

Introduction

When you visit a hospital, bank, or any other public place you feel happy and comfortable when somebody is readily available to help or guide you. You can avail yourself of the services easily and satisfactorily. Similarly reference services are provided in libraries to help the readers in making use of library facilities. For example, the readers visiting a library may not know the location of different sections of the library, how to consult an Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and retrieve information from it, whether a particular journal or database is subscribed by the library or not. In such a situation, it is the duty of the library staff to help the readers by providing the relevant information.

In essence, reference service is providing relevant and timely information to help the readers. The libraries are service-oriented institutions. They exist to acquire, collect, organize and disseminate information, which is contained in different documents-print, audio, video and digital. The libraries acquire different documents, process them and make them available to the readers for use. They prepare and maintain tools like catalogue, shelf list, bibliographies to facilitate the use of books and other material by the readers.

The libraries intend to convert potential visitors into regular users. To achieve this, a human agency is needed to tell the users about the various resources and services offered by the libraries. The human agency or the staff of the library offers help to the readers in the form of reference service. Samuel Green, (Father of Reference Services) the librarian of the Worcester Free Public Library in Massachusetts, introduced the concept of reference service when he suggested that the librarian should assist the user in the selection of books. (Genz, 1998). Since then, the concept of reference service has evolved a lot. The development of reference service has passed through several stages, reflecting changes in library philosophy, technology, and user needs. The term 'reference service' now denotes a wide range of activities undertaken by the library staff to promote and ensure use of collections and services offered by them.

DEFINITION OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Reference service is the process of helping readers to identify sources of information in response to a particular query, problem or assignment to be done.

Ranganathan has defined reference service as a personal service to each reader in helping her/him to find the document, answering the particular query, pinpointedly, exhaustively and expeditiously. Ranganathan has also emphasised that the reference service aims at "providing the right book to the right reader at the right time."

The Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association defines reference transactions, sometimes referred to as reference service, as "information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs" (RUSA, 2008). These reference transactions can take place in person, on the telephone, or virtually via e-mail, chat reference, instant messaging, social media, or videoconferencing. Librarians are also creating websites, answer archives, and links to frequently asked questions all of which are designed to anticipate user questions and help people independently find information.

Margaret Hutchins has defined reference service as direct personal aid within a library, to persons in search of information for whatever purpose and also various activities specially aimed at making information as easily available as possible.

William Katz opines that reference service is behind the scene activities of the reference library in the selection, acquisition and maintenance of the library stock and its careful and administration.

EVOLUTION OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Evolution means the transformation of reference service from simple personal assistance at the library desk to complex, technology-driven, and virtual interactions. Studying the evolution of reference service helps us to appreciate how library services have adapted to user needs over time, understand the impact of technology on information delivery and ultimately prepares us for emerging trends in digital and AI-driven information environments.

The concept of reference service is over a century old. In 1876, Samuel Green, librarian of the Worcester Free Public Library in Massachusetts, developed the idea of having librarians assisting users in the selection of books to suit their needs. This served a dual function, increasing the use of his library's collection and thereby demonstrating the need for the library. Green saw the role

of the public library as one of welcoming users by having a pleasant and cultivated female staff (Genz, 1998).

Some forty years later, in 1915, at the thirty-seventh meeting of the American Library Association, a paper on reference work was delivered by William Warner Bishop, the superintendent of the Reading Room of the Library of Congress. Bishop defined reference work as "the service rendered by a librarian in aid of some sort of study," claiming that it was "an organized effort on the part of libraries in aid of the most expeditious and fruitful use of their books"(Genz, 1998: 511).

Charles Williamson further developed the idea of reference service in his 1923 report "Training for Library Service: A Report Prepared for the Carnegie Corporation of New York," which included a course description for reference work.

More recently, several authors, including William A. Katz (2001) and Linda C. Smith and Melissa A. Wong (2016), wrote reference texts in which they continued to refine the role of the reference librarian over the subsequent decades. Perhaps the most important point to remember is that reference service seeks to fulfill the greater mission of the library by assisting individual users. Despite the many transformations that have been wrought on reference work by developments of our information society and paradigm shifts in the self-understandings of the library, much has remained the same.

Distinct Features of reference service in the 19th century

i. Conducted face-to-face.

ii. Focused mainly on helping readers locate materials.

iii. Aimed to promote the use of the library.

Early 20th Century

During the early 20th century, reference service became a formal department in many libraries, and the libraries created reference desks and appointed reference librarians. During this time as well, the librarians began to prepare bibliographies, reading lists, and guides to help users.

Distinct Features of reference service in the 20th century

i. Systematic organization of reference work.

ii. Development of professional standards and ethics.

iii. Introduction of reference training in library schools.

Expansion and Diversification (Mid-20th Century) During this era;

i. We had the growth of universities, research activities, and information explosion increased the demand for reference services.

ii. Librarians began to specialize by subject areas (e.g., science, law, medicine).

iii. Telephone reference service was introduced.

iv. User education and library orientation became part of reference work.

Key Developments:

- Subject or liaison librarians emerged.

- Telephone and postal reference services.

- Introduction of bibliographic instruction.

Technological and Automation Era (1970s–1990s). During this era;

The introduction of computers and information technology changed reference service completely.

Libraries started using Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs), CD-ROMs, and electronic databases.

Reference librarians learned how to search online databases such as DIALOG and LEXIS/NEXIS.

Email reference services also started during this period.

Key Features:

Automation of library catalogues.

Shift from print to electronic information sources.

Reference librarians became skilled in database searching and information retrieval.

Digital and Virtual Reference Era (2000s–Present)

The rise of the Internet, social media, and mobile technology led to the development of virtual reference services.

Key Features

i. Librarians can now assist users through, Email, Chat, Video conferencing and Social media platforms

ii. Reference services have become available 24/7, transcending time and location barriers.

iii. Libraries now provide digital literacy training, research data management, and online information support.

Emerging Trends (Future Directions)

The future of reference services is being shaped by new technologies and user expectations.

Emerging trends include:

1. **AI-Assisted Reference Service:** Use of artificial intelligence to provide instant and personalized responses to user queries.

2. **Embedded Librarianship:** Librarians are now part of academic departments or research teams, providing reference assistance within users' work environments.

3. **Data and Research Support:**
   Reference librarians assist researchers in data management, citation analysis, and publication strategies.

4. **User-Centered Design:**
   Reference services are now focused on user experience, accessibility, and inclusivity.

Summary of Key Stages in the Evolution of Reference Service

Period	Characteristics	Mode of Service
Late 19th Century	Origin of reference service (S. S. Green, 1876)	Face-to-face assistance
Early 20th Century	Institutionalization and professionalization	Reference desks, printed guides
Mid-20th Century	Expansion and subject specialization	Telephone/mail, bibliographic instruction
1970s–1990s	Technological/automation era	OPACs, databases, email reference
2000s–Present	Digital and virtual era	Online chat, social media, 24/7 virtual reference
Future	AI and embedded reference	AI chatbots, embedded librarianship

THEORIES AND OBJECTIVES OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

THEORIES

Theories are simply an idea or set of ideas that is intended to explain facts or events

Reference theories are important because;

It helps to improve the quality of user interactions.

It assists in designing better information systems and services.

It develops empathy and understanding of user behavior.

It helps to adapt to changes in technology and user expectations.

It helps to maintain a balance between human touch and technological efficiency.

Theories of Reference and Information Services

James Wyer has described three different philosophies of Reference Service which are labelled as "Conservative", "Moderate" and "Liberal". These only are known as Minimum, Middling, and Maximum by Samuel Rothstein.

1. Conservative or Minimum

Conservative Reference Services approach provides occasional personal assistance to the inexperienced and dazed reader. It limits the help to pointing the way only and so it is traditional in nature. The reference librarian helps the users in finding resources but does not read or interpret those sources for the user.

2. Moderate or Middling

The moderate reference service goes beyond providing mere instruction to actually helping the reader in using the book or finding the document and facts, etc. The reference librarian searches exhaustively to find answers for research and factual questions.

3. Liberal or Maximum

It includes the provision of providing complete and reliable information to the readers. In this case reference librarians takes the user question and conduct the research, finds appropriate material

and presents it to the user. The reference librarian, if needed, also writes the summary or analysis of the information found. Generally, this kind of reference service is given in special libraries.

In summary the conservative approach emphasises over instruction over answers; the liberal approach emphasises answers over instructions and the moderate approach comprises equal part of each (Bopp and Smith, 2011).

OBJECTIVES OF REFERENCE SERVICE

The reference service is an opportunity for librarians to ignite a users/patron's sense of wonder about the endless paths of learning found within library resources. The major objectives of providing reference services to its users are:

1. To Assist Users in Finding Information: The primary objective of reference service is to help users locate the right information to meet their needs. Librarians guide users to relevant sources such as books, journals, databases, and websites.

2. To Save the Time of the User: Following Ranganathan's Fourth Law of Library Science ("Save the time of the reader"), reference service ensures users get information quickly and efficiently. Librarians help users avoid time wastage by directing them to accurate and relevant sources.

3. Provide Accurate and Reliable Information: Reference service ensures that the information given to users is accurate, up-to-date, and authoritative. Librarians evaluate information sources before recommending them to users.

4. To Promote the Effective Use of Library Resources: Reference librarians educate users on how to use catalogues, indexes, databases, and other tools. The goal is to increase library usage and enhance user independence.

5. To Educate Users (User Education and Information Literacy): Reference service aims to teach users how to find and use information by themselves. This includes library orientation, bibliographic instruction, and information literacy training.

6. To Interpret the Library's Resources to Users: Many users are unaware of the wide range of resources available. Reference librarians interpret and explain how to use these materials effectively.

7. To Encourage Lifelong Learning and Research: By helping users develop good information-seeking habits, reference service supports self-education, research, and lifelong learning.

8. To Bridge the Gap Between Users and Information: Reference service connects users with the most suitable information sources, formats, and media. It ensures that all users, including those with disabilities or special needs, can access information equitably.

9. To Provide Personalized and Confidential Assistance: Reference service provides individualized help tailored to each user's need. It also respects user privacy and maintains confidentiality in information requests.

10. To Support Academic and Institutional Goals: In academic and research libraries, reference service supports teaching, learning, and research objectives of the parent institution.